



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Maryland's Social Services Agency



MEDIA RELEASE

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DHR USHERS IN NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH BY APPLAUDING FAMILIES FROM THE CAPITAL MARYLAND AREA

Montgomery and Prince George's Counties name families of the year

BALTIMORE – The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) got a head start on celebrating National Adoption Awareness month by honoring families from **Montgomery** and **Prince Georg's Counties** that contributed to the **770 total adoptions** finalized during fiscal year 2009.

“We have much to celebrate,” said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. We have seen a 15 percent reduction in the overall number of children in foster care; a 43 percent decline in group home placements; we have recruited 1,500 new foster parents since 2007; and we found families for 770 children during our last fiscal year.”

The successes Donald highlighted were driven by the Department's **Place Matters** initiative. This initiative builds on the premise that nothing matters more to a child than a place to call home.

Each of the local departments of social services honored families from their jurisdiction that adopted during the last year. These families were recognized for their commitment to adoption, their support of the agency's goals, and their efforts to produce the best possible outcomes for children. The Capital Area jurisdictions honored the following families:

Montgomery County Department of Social Services recognized **Charlie and Jenni Weller**.

The Weller family was licensed as foster and adoptive parents in January of 2004. They began caring for Kimberly and Sherry. Mia joined their family in the summer of 2007, as an emergency placement. They worked diligently with Kimberly and Sherry's biological mother towards reunification and even co-planned birthday parties and other important events with the girls' biological mother. When Kimberly and Sherry's permanency plan changed to adoption, Jenni and Charlie were ready to adopt them. Mia fit right into the family and all three girls have become sisters. The Wellers continue to teach the girls to stand up for themselves, develop their self-esteem and take an active part in the world around them.

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Prince George's County Department of Social Services recognized Darla Sligh.

Ms. Sligh always knew that she wanted to be a mother. Her commitment to accept the joys and challenges that children bring to a family has never waived. She is the adoptive mother of three girls. Darla is an athlete and avid sports fan and envisioned adopting boys. However, when Marissa and Zanaya, ages 6 and 5, were presented to her in 2006, Darla felt an instant connection. She later adopted Atlanis, too. The girls needed some special help and were described as shy, lacking confidence and immature. They are now excellent students and excel in gymnastics, soccer, and dance.

The celebration for the families was held at the Baltimore Zoo's Mansion House. In addition to an awards luncheon for their contributions, the families were also treated to an afternoon at the zoo with their children. "This is our 13th year of celebrating adoptions with an awards luncheon, but our families will tell you the biggest reward for them was being able to add these wonderful children to their families," Donald stated.

Additional information about this year's honorees can be found by visiting the DHR newsroom at www.dhr.state.md.us and clicking on the "Newsroom" tab on the left side of the page.

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The 2009 Families of the Year from jurisdictions across the state include:

Allegany County	Eugene and Jeanne Miller
Anne Arundel County	Mark and Lisa Walinski
Baltimore City	Donald and Arnissa Ames Brandi Beckner Jim and Julia Forest Avan Howard Mark and Judy Schlothauer
Baltimore County	Jason and Donna Neidinger
Calvert County	Jerry-y and Mary Lee
Caroline County	Ron and Vicky Marquess
Carroll County	Marshall and Chrissie Thompson
Cecil County	Rick and Marianne Shull
Charles County	Lionel and Shelia Carroll
Dorchester County	Joseph and Glenda Smith
Frederick County	Douglas and Maureen Garlock
Garrett County	Danny and Barbara Baker
Harford County	Robert and Yvonne Cossey
Howard County	Deirdre Henderson
Montgomery County	Charlie and Jenni Weller
Prince George's County	Darla Sligh
Queen Anne's County	Mark and Darla Verdonck
St. Mary's County	Gary and Vickie Ferko
Somerset County	Jonathan and Cherry Conley
Talbot County	Deborah Fletcher
Washington County	Tom and Toni Barnhart
Wicomico County	Scott and Amy Ness
Worcester County	Augustine Cook

The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.

- Martin O'Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary